

few of the negroes were armed, it was little less than murder that they [the crowd] proposed.” MacRae acknowledged that all the black men were concerned about were their homes.<sup>47</sup>



Captain Donald MacRae  
Image: William L. DeRossett, *Pictorial and Historical New Hanover*.

Rountree then called for the rapid-fire gun from the armory to be brought to the compress so it could be used to intimidate people into peacefulness. Rountree had been surprised by the outbreak of violence, having been asleep during the opening round when Waddell’s followers burned the *Record*. Rountree had awakened to gunshots and rushed to the post office, meeting businessman and postmaster James H. Chadbourn Jr. there. They immediately began planning the steps they would take to mount a political coup.<sup>48</sup> Afterwards, Rountree returned home, retrieved his Winchester, and walked to the corner with his gun on his shoulder and “feeling very much like a fool,” he later recalled. After seeing no action, he returned his gun to his house, went back to the corner near Sprunt’s

compress and saw the blacks begin to congregate. As he helped to calm the crowd, Rountree recalled that one of the black workers asked him what they had done to justify being the target of all the armed whites eager to shoot. Rountree acknowledged he could not supply an answer.<sup>49</sup>

Sprunt and other white business leaders continued to try to calm the blacks and encouraged them to disperse and return to work. Sprunt and his colleagues also appealed to the whites who wanted to open fire into the crowd of blacks who failed to disperse fast enough. In an effort to convince his workers that their houses were not in jeopardy, Sprunt sent a trusted black man accompanied by a white man out into the community in Sprunt’s personal buggy to ascertain the damage and danger so he could report his findings to his fellow employees.<sup>50</sup> Once the worker returned and reported that only the press had been burned, the crowd seemed a bit calmer and started to disperse.<sup>51</sup> Sprunt and the other whites offered to accompany men to their homes while others stayed at the compress in fear. Many of Sprunt’s workers were then escorted home in small groups by armed white men.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Rountree, “Memorandum.”

<sup>50</sup> McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 709.

<sup>51</sup> Rountree, “Memorandum.”

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Rivera, an African American citizen of the city at the time of the riot, related to historian Helen Edmonds that Sprunt, in efforts to protect his workers, had his private yacht brought around so that its guns were aimed at the armed whites while the factory doors were barricaded to keep his workers safely inside. Sprunt could very well have had guns on his boat since in April 1898, just after war was declared on Spain, the U.S. Navy compiled a list of Cape Fear steamers and drew up instructions for equipping those steamers with one- and six-pound cannon. Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 169; “Story of the Wilmington Riot” *Charlotte Daily Observer*, May 24, 1905; Watson, *Wilmington, Port of North Carolina*, 128.

<sup>47</sup> “Minutes of the Association of the WLI,” North Carolina Collection.

<sup>48</sup> Chadbourn had previously supported the Republican Party wholeheartedly, being appointed to the Police Board under the Republican administration of Silas P. Wright and postmaster for the city. However, under immense pressure from local Democrats in Wilmington, Chadbourn publicly recanted his support of the Republican Party and pledged himself to “white rule.” Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 62-65.